

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Some disks don't stack up in test

A higher price does not guarantee higher quality in PC diskettes.

That's the startling conclusion of the "1987 Floppy Disk Quality Report" recently released by Memcon Corp., an independent research firm that tested 18 of the most popular brands of diskettes on the market.

With more than 1.5 billion floppies sold since the introduction of the IBM PC in 1981 — and predictions calling for sales of billions more in the coming years — diskettes have truly become a commodity product. For increasing numbers of personal computer users, quality and reliability — as well as price — of the floppy have become key issues.

The report found that not only does price have little or nothing to do with quality, but prices for similar quality can vary as much as 200 percent from one distributor to another. You might find yourself pay-

ing as little as \$8.40 for a box of 10 Dysan disks from one dealer, while another charges as much as \$23.90.

Memcon's sample was based on 10 boxes of 10 disks each for 18 brands of diskettes purchased from various distributors across the country. The brands tested were BASF, Dysan, Fuji, Goldstar, JVC, Kodak, Maxell, Memorex, Nashua, Polaroid, Sentinel, Sony, Syncom, TDK, 3M, Verbatim, Wabash and Xidex Precision.

In addition to price analysis, tests included visual inspection, dimensional testing of thickness and flatness, magnetic characteristics, wear resistance, and functional ability to record and resurrect data. American National Standards Institute limits were used as minimum requirements, and the report covered only 5¼-inch, 48 tracks per inch, double-sided, double-density, 360-kilobyte brand

disks.

Some highlights of the survey:

✓ Price: Although it had the highest average price, \$1.62 a disk, Dysan also had the highest rate of failure in functional testing. Of 100 Dysan disks, three failed to pass the basic test for accepting formatting and storage retrieval of data.

✓ Visual defects: Testing included frayed liners, jacket deformities, package contaminants and seal defects. Only four manufacturers — Fuji, Kodak, Memorex and TDK — tested perfect. At the other end of the scale, 3M had a total of 125 defects on 100 disks. One Dysan disk actually had two "cookies," the basic magnetic recording medium, inside one jacket. One box of 10 Verbatim disks had what appeared to be human hair throughout the box and on the disk surfaces.

✓ Missing bits: JVC topped the scale for the most disks qualifying as Grade A, with 99 of the 100 tested. Kodak and Memorex each ranked 98. Dysan, Goldstar and Wabash each had three disks out of

100 fail minimum ANSI standards. Only seven brands had 100 percent of their disks pass as Grade C or above: BASF, JVC, Kodak, Memorex, Nashua, Sony and 3M.

✓ Extra bits: Five brands had a perfect score on passing ANSI standards: BASF, Goldstar, JVC, Memorex and TDK. Kodak had the most failures, 27, followed by Xidex with 20 and Dysan with 19.

✓ Six brands had at least one disk that could not pass a standard data recovery test. The brands were Dysan, Syncom, TDK, 3M, Wabash and Xidex.

The bottom line: No one's perfect, but some diskettes — notably Memorex — fared much better than others in the tests. To obtain a copy of the report contact Memcon, 2410 S. 156th Circle, Omaha, Neb., 68130; (800) 453-4415.

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